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ABSTRACT

Which spelling words should students master in order to communicate well in writing? There are numerous sources from which teachers may choose spelling words to use and teach. This paper discusses five such sources: the basal spelling textbook; words based on research studies; individualized spelling; words taken from subject matter units of study; and spelling words already mastered. Finally, the paper briefly outlines 10 characteristics of a forward-looking spelling program. (Contains 10 references.) (SR)

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Word Selection in the Spelling Curriculum.

by Marlow Ediger

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WORD SELECTION IN THE SPELLING CURRICULUM

Which spelling words should students master in order to communicate well in writing? This is a question which needs a relevant answer. To be sure, there are a plethora of words for students to learn to spell correctly, but these may not be functional or useful words. There are numerous sources from which spelling words may come for teachers to use and teach and for students to master.

The Basal Spelling Textbook

Basal spelling textbooks have been used over the years as a source of words for students to master. The writers of the text used, selected the words contained therein. The spelling words are listed in terms of what students are to learn per week. Along with the weekly list of words, there are learning opportunities for students for each of the five days of the school week. The following is provided as an example:

1. Monday. Students with teacher assistance go over the new words by emphasizing correct identification and pronunciation of each (See Ediger, 1976, 282-283). Learners are to attach a correct contextual definition of each within a sentence. Meanings of new concepts and vocabulary terms are important. Students then study their correct spelling in different ways. Some write each new word several times to ensure mastery. Others use the words in written sentences. When studying, the correct spelling is frequently checked against that listed in the basal textbook. The basal also has words to be filled in to sentences, using those rom the weekly list.
2. Tuesday. Students fill in a crossword puzzle contained in the text by using the new words from the spelling list. They also engage in a word search activity contained in the text. The words in the word search activity come from the spelling list for the present week. A trial test is taken to notice which words have been mastered and which are left to learn to spell. Words misspelled are studied for the correct spelling by the learner.
3. Wednesday. Students are asked to write a story using all or most of the new words in the writing. Correct spelling of each new word is stressed.
4. Thursday. A second test is given, after students have studied the correct spelling again of the weekly new words. Those students spelling all the words correctly need not be tested on Friday.
5. Friday. Those students who misspelled words on Thursday are given the final test for the weekly list of words. Diagnosis may occur of misspelled words at any point of the weekly schedule which include handwriting errors (See Ediger, 1974, 62- 64).

The teaching model in spelling from a basal text should be examined

and assessed by teachers to ascertain if this approach would assist students to become good spellers. There are learning activities in the basal which can serve as a model and be good for teachers to use in any program of spelling instruction. Proper instruction in phonics should be balanced with holism in teaching spelling

Words Based on Research Studies

There a plethora of research studies which have been made on the most commonly used spelling words in student writings. Researchers here have gone to some pains to identify commonly used spelling words. These can be a source of spelling words for elementary age pupils to master. Dolch (1955) identified through research studies the 220 most commonly used words by pupils in spelling. Even though this list came out in 1955, the author of this article still receives requests from former students for the Dolch list! There are no teaching suggestions provided for having students master the correct spelling of words in the Dolch list. The teacher needs to be creative in guiding students with learning opportunities to spell each word correctly. Also, there are no sequences in terms of order for word mastery. The author here recommended that the teacher use these words for enrichment purposes to challenge those who desire to master additional new words in spelling. An interest center with related tasks may be set up for those who need to be motivated to spell additional words in functional spelling, using the Dolch list. Activities in spelling need to be interesting, meaningful, and purposeful. Words being mastered in spelling should be used in functional writing situations. Good study habits need to be developed within students to persevere and accomplish.

Individualized Spelling

There are individual words which students misspell in daily writing. What is misspelled may become a set of spelling words for that child to master. Each misspelled word may be printed on a 3 by 4 inch card. Those words which have been mastered may then be placed in a separate set by the involved learner and then notice that stack of cards grow in number as a motivator. The words misspelled in class work need to be adjusted in terms of what the involved child can reasonably learn to spell correctly within a week or other suitable interval of time. The method to use may be decided by the learner. If necessary, the teacher may assist the student to develop an appropriate methodology in learning to spell these words correctly. Many teachers have found the following method to work well with students in learning to spell words correctly:

a) the student looks at the word carefully.
b) he/she needs to pronounce each word correctly and listen to the

grapheme/phoneme correspondence of involved letters.

c) the student should write the word once and then check with the correct spelling.

d) he/she may write the word within a sentence, checking again to notice the correctness of the spelling (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Eight).

Individualized spelling may be used along with the enrichment center of important words listed thereon for voluntary student mastery. These words may also become a part of the total spelling program when the basal text is used. The total number of words to be mastered in spelling must harmonize with what is a reasonable load for mastery learning of a specific student.

Words Taken from Subject Matter Units of Study

Spelling words for students to master may also come from an academic discipline which provides content for an ongoing unit of study. Thus in a social studies unit on the Middle Ages, the student may learn to spell the following words: nobleman, knight, serf, manner, guilds, crop rotation, tournaments, warfare, and, and plow. Each word needs to be used meaningfully in context when it is being mastered in spelling. Illustrations may be collected or drawn which relate directly to the unit word being mastered in spelling. The spelling curriculum becomes integrated when it cuts across academic lines in search of words for student mastery.

With the strong emphasis being placed upon students learning to read well and on grade level by the end of grade three, it appears to be a good practice to have the teacher take the new words listed in the manual section of the basal reader and have students learn to spell each correctly. These new words then are studied not only from the goal or objective of reading them correctly, but that end is also reinforced with learning to spell each of these words correctly. Certainly, better readers should be in the offing (Ediger, 2001, 79-83).

Making Application of Spelling Words Mastered

Teachers need to guide students to use words mastered in spelling so that their correct spelling is not forgotten. There are then many uses which may be made of the correct spelling of new/old words in context. The following are examples (See Also Ediger, 1977, 25-28):

1. computerized programmed spelling games played involving individualized/cooperative endeavors.
2. poetry written using previously learned words in spelling.
3. crossword puzzles and word searches used in teaching spelling.
4. games made and used in the spelling curriculum.

5. labels on charts and graphs containing spelling words mastered.
6. paragraphs, short stories, and outlines containing spelling words being taught.
7. summaries and conclusions providing students practice in using spelling words in context.
8. book reports with current spelling words being taught.
9. play parts written with new spelling words included.
10. antonyms or synonyms written from a current list of spelling words from the basal text (See Ediger, 2000,14-21).

Spelling words being studied by students need to be used in order that forgetting the correct spelling is not in vogue. Then too, students perceive the relevance of studying that which has use and is utilitarian.

A Forward Looking Spelling Program

Teachers need to look forward at what might be in a quality spelling program. From what exists to something better needs to be in the offing. What might a futuristic spelling program emphasize for students?

1. it cuts across the different academic disciplines in seeking relevant words for students to master.
2. it begins with where the individual student is presently in spelling achievement and then provides for optimal sequence in learning to spell words.
3. it has a clearly spelled out scope and ordered approach in students learning to spell words correctly.
4. it emphasizes students making application of words spelled correctly.
5. it provides enrichment learnings for students who achieve well and motivates those who need to achieve more optimally in spelling.
6. it helps students to perceive purpose or reasons for learning to spell words correctly.
7. it provides ample opportunities for students to attach meaning and understanding to words being considered for mastery learning.
8. it stresses writing for a variety of reasons using the new words encountered in spelling.
9. it emphasizes reading of subject matter containing the new spelling words.
10. it encourages students individually to compete against themselves, rather than against others (Ediger, 1992, 12-26).

Closing

the spelling curriculum needs to be kept updated and current so that each student learns to spell relevant words. Relevant words chosen for

student mastery should be learned in a variety of ways in providing for individual differences among learners. Students do possess different styles of learning (See Searson and Dunn, 2001). They also possess diverse intelligences to show what has been learned and achieved (Gardner, 1993). It behooves the school district to provide the best spelling curriculum possible for each student.

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